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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Patent of	:	
Myers et al.	:	
Patent No.: 6,622,412	:	
Issue Date: 09/23/2003	:	
Application No. 09/854087	:	
Filing or 371(c) Date: 05/11/2001	:	ON PETITION
Title of Invention:	:	
ABOVE BARREL GRIP APPARATUS	:	

This is a decision on the "Petition to Accept Unavoidably Delayed Payment of Maintenance Fee in an Expired Patent (37 CFR § 1.378(b))," filed June 4, 2010, to reinstate the above-identified patent.

The petition is **DISMISSED**.

Any further petition to revive the above-identified application must be submitted within **TWO (2) MONTHS** from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition under 37 CFR 1.137." This is **not** final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 704.

Background

The patent issued September 23, 2003. Patentee could have paid the three and one half (3½) year maintenance fee between September 23, 2006, and March 23, 2007, without a surcharge, or within the six (6) month grace period between March 24, 2007 and September 23, 2007. Patentee failed to do so; accordingly, the patent became expired on September 24, 2007.

The present petition

Petitioner/Patentee files the present petition and provides that the reason maintenance fee payment was unavoidably delayed was because of financial inability to pay the maintenance fee. More specifically, Petitioner states that he was notified by his attorney that the maintenance fee for the present patent was due by March 23, 2007. Three months prior, Petitioner's divorce was finalized. Petitioner states that the divorce left Petitioner financially devastated. Further to this, Petitioner provides that he recently changed jobs within the company, but will remain employed.

In support of Petitioner's assertions, Petitioner files a copy of the letter from his attorney informing him of the due date for the maintenance fee; a copy of his Dissolution of Marriage dated June 28, 2006, and a copy of Internet pages of, inter alia, AEP's expenditure and staff reduction plans.

Applicable Law, Rules and MPEP

35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1) states:

The Commissioner may accept the payment of any maintenance fee required subsection (b) of this section which is made within twenty-four months after the six-month grace period if this delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to have been unintentional, or at any time after the six-month grace period if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Director to have been unavoidable.

37 CFR 1.378(b) provides that a patent may be reinstated at any time following expiration of the patent for failure to timely pay a maintenance fee. A petition to accept late payment of a maintenance fee, where the delay was unavoidable, must include:

- (A) the required maintenance fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(e)-(g);
- (B) the surcharge set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(i)(1); and
- (C) a showing that the delay was unavoidable since reasonable care was taken to ensure that the maintenance fee would be paid timely and that the petition was filed promptly after the patentee was notified of, or otherwise became aware of, the expiration of the patent.

37 CFR 1.378(b)/(C) requires a showing that the delay in paying the maintenance fee was unavoidable despite reasonable care being taken to ensure that the maintenance fee would be timely paid. The required showing must enumerate the steps taken to ensure timely payment of the maintenance fee, the date and the manner in which patentee became aware of the expiration of the patent, and the steps taken to file the petition promptly. Furthermore, an adequate showing requires a statement by all persons with direct knowledge of the cause of the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them. Copies of all documentary evidence referred to in a statement should be furnished as exhibits to the statement. (Emphasis supplied).

As language in 35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1) is identical to that in 35 U.S.C. § 133 (i.e., "unavoidable" delay), a late maintenance fee for the unavoidable delay standard is considered under the same standard for reviving an abandoned application under 35 U.S.C. § 133. See *Ray v. Lehman*, 55 F.3d 606, 608-09, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (quoting *In re Patent No. 4,409,763*, 7 USPQ2d 1798, 1800 (Comm'r Pat. 1988), *aff'd sub nom. Rydeen v. Quigg*, 748 F. Supp. 900, 16 USPQ2d 1876 (D.D.C. 1990), *aff'd*, 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991) (table), *cert. denied*, 502 U.S. 1075 (1992)). See MPEP § 711.03(c) for a general discussion of the "unavoidable" delay standard.

Because 35 U.S.C. § 41(c) requires the payment of fees at specified intervals to maintain a patent in force, rather than some response to a specific action by the Office under 35 U.S.C. § 133, a

reasonably prudent person in the exercise of due care and diligence would have taken steps to ensure the timely payment of such maintenance fees. Ray, 55 F.3d at 609, 34 USPQ2d at 1788.

That is, an adequate showing that the delay in payment of the maintenance fee at issue was "unavoidable" within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 41(c) and 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3) requires a showing of the steps taken to ensure the timely payment of the maintenance fees for this patent. *Id.* Thus, where the record fails to disclose that the patentee took reasonable steps, or discloses that the patentee took no steps, to ensure timely payment of the maintenance fee, 35 U.S.C. 41(c) and 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3) preclude acceptance of the delayed payment of the maintenance fee under 37 CFR 1.378(b).

35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1) does not require an affirmative finding that the delay was unavoidable, but only an explanation as to why petitioner has failed to carry the burden to establish that the delay was unavoidable. *Cf. Commissariat A. L'Energie Atomique v. Watson*, 274 F. 2d 594, 597, 124 USPQ 126, 128 (D.C. Cir. 1960) (35 U.S.C. § 133 does not require the Director to affirmatively find that the delay was unavoidable, but only to explain why applicant's petition was unavailing). Petitioner is reminded that it is the patentee's burden under the statutes and regulations to make a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the delay in payment of a maintenance fee is unavoidable. *See, Rydeen v. Quigg*, 748 F. Supp. 900, 16 USPQ2d 1876 (D.D.C. 1990), *aff'd* 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991) (table), *cert. denied*, 502 U.S. 1075 (1992); *Ray v. Lehman*, *supra*.

In view of the requirement to enumerate the steps taken to ensure timely payment of the maintenance fee, the patentee's lack of knowledge of the need to pay the maintenance fee and the failure to receive the Maintenance Fee Reminder do not constitute unavoidable delay. *See Patent No. 4,409,763*, *supra*. *See also* Final Rule entitled "*Final Rules for Patent Maintenance Fees*," published in the *Federal Register* at 49 Fed. Reg. 34716, 34722-23 (August 31, 1984), and republished in the *Official Gazette* at 1046 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office 28, 34 (September 25, 1984). Under the statutes and rules, the Office has no duty to notify patentees of the requirement to pay maintenance fees or to notify patentees when the maintenance fees are due. It is solely the responsibility of the patentee to assure that the maintenance fee is timely paid to prevent expiration of the patent. The lack of knowledge of the requirement to pay a maintenance fee and the failure to receive the Maintenance Fee Reminder will not shift the burden of monitoring the time for paying a maintenance fee from the patentee to the Office. Thus, evidence that despite reasonable care on behalf of the patentee and/or the patentee's agents, and reasonable steps to ensure timely payment, the maintenance fee was unavoidably not paid, could be submitted in support of an argument that the delay in payment was unavoidable.

Moreover, the Patent and Trademark Office must rely on the actions or inactions of duly authorized and voluntarily chosen representatives of the applicant, and applicant is bound by the consequences of those actions or inactions. *Link v. Wabash*, 370 U.S. 626, 633-34 (1962); *Huston v. Ladner*, 973 F.2d 1564, 1567, 23 USPQ2d 1910, 1913 (Fed. Cir. 1992); *see also Haines v. Quigg*, 673 F. Supp. 314, 317, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1132 (D.N. Ind. 1987). Specifically, petitioner's delay caused by the actions or inactions of his voluntarily chosen representative does not constitute unavoidable delay within the meaning of 35 USC 133 or 37 CFR 1.137(a). *Haines v. Quigg*, 673 F. Supp. 314, 5 USPQ2d 1130 (D. Ind. 1987); *Smith v. Diamond*, 209 USPQ 1091 (D.D.C. 1981); *Potter v. Dann*, 201 USPQ 574 (D.D.C. 1978); *Ex parte Murray*, 1891 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 130, 131 (Comm'r Pat. 1891). *In re Mattullath*, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15

(1912)(quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 167-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff'd, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (1913).

Finally, Petitioner should note that a breakdown of communication between the party responsible for payment of the maintenance fee and their client is not considered to be grounds for granting a petition for late payment of the maintenance fee under the unavoidable standard. See, *Ray v. Lehman*, 55 F.3d 606, 608-09, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995).

Opinion

Initially it is noted that Petitioner must account for the entire delay, from the time the patent expired to the time of the filing of a grantable petition. Here, the patent expired on September 24, 2007. Petitioner provides that he was divorced shortly before the maintenance fee was due, which left him financially devastated at the time the maintenance fee was due, and that he changed jobs "last week," presumably a week before filing the present petition on June 4, 2010; however, Petitioner has not explained his finances, only his expenditures. Petitioner has not provided information as to his income and expenditures, nor has Petitioner provided documentary evidence that would support information as to his income and expenditures. Information regarding Petitioner's income and expenditures must demonstrate that Petitioner was unable to pay the maintenance fee for the entire period of the delay, from the time the patent expired to the time of the filing of a grantable petition. The standard requires Petitioner to prove that the delay was unavoidable. A petition will not be granted if petitioner provides insufficient evidence to "show" that the delay was unavoidable.

The documentary evidence required to support Petitioner's inability to pay the maintenance fee must include evidence that support Petitioners' financial situation. A showing of "unavoidable" delay based upon financial difficulty must establish that the responsible party (i.e., an individual or the company) lacked the financial resources to pay the maintenance fee for the above-identified patent in a timely manner. To establish that the responsible party did not have the financial resources to pay the maintenance fee during the relevant period, petitioner should provide a month by month accounting of his income, profits, credits, and assets, as well as monthly obligations, expenses and bills (such as rent, mortgage, insurance, medical costs, utilities, etc.). Petitioner should also explain how much disposable income or profits he had on a monthly basis, which could have been used to pay the maintenance fee in a timely manner. Petitioner must provide the Office with copies of any documents that could confirm Petitioner's financial difficulty during the entire period from September 24, 2007, until the date of the filing of a grantable petition.

Petitioner is cautioned to avoid submitting personal information in documents filed in a patent application that may contribute to identity theft. Personal information such as social security numbers, bank account numbers, or credit card numbers (other than a check or credit card authorization form PTO-2038 submitted for payment purposes) is never required by the USPTO to support a petition or an application. If this type of personal information is included in documents submitted to the USPTO, petitioners/applicants should consider redacting such personal information from the documents before submitting them to the USPTO. Petitioner/applicant is advised that the record of a patent application is available to the public after publication of the application (unless a non-

publication request in compliance with 37 CFR 1.213(a) is made in the application) or issuance of a patent. Furthermore, the record from an abandoned application may also be available to the public if the application is referenced in a published application or an issued patent (see 37 CFR 1.14). Checks and credit card authorization forms PTO-2038 submitted for payment purposes are not retained in the application file and therefore are not publicly available.

Petitioner's current options

I. Petitioner may file a request for reconsideration.

If reconsideration of this decision is desired, a petition for reconsideration must be filed within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. The petition for reconsideration should be entitled "Petition for Reconsideration under 37 CFR 1.378(b)." Any petition for reconsideration of this decision must be accompanied by a non-refundable petition fee of \$400 as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(h).

After a decision on the petition for reconsideration, no further reconsideration or review of the matter will be undertaken by the Commissioner. Therefore, it is extremely important that petitioner supply **any** and **all** relevant information and documentation with his request for reconsideration. The Commissioner's decision will be based solely on the administrative record in existence. Petitioner should remember that it is not enough that the delay was unavoidable; petitioner must **prove** that the delay was unavoidable. A petition will not be granted if petitioner provides insufficient evidence to 'show' that the delay was unavoidable. Therefore, if a request for reconsideration is filed, it must establish that the entire delay in the submission of the maintenance fee was unavoidable.

II. Petitioner may request a refund of the maintenance fee and surcharge which accompanied the petition.

Petitioner may request a refund of the maintenance fee and surcharge by writing to the Office of Finance, Refund Section, Commissioner for Patents, Washington, DC, 20231. A copy of this decision should accompany petitioner's request.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail: Mail Stop PETITIONS
 Director for Patents
 PO Box 1450
 Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By FAX: (571) 273-8300
 Attn: Office of Petitions

By hand: Customer Service Window
 Randolph Building
 401 Dulany Street
 Alexandria, VA 22314

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Telephone inquiries concerning this matter should be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3232.

/DLW/

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